

The Ancient Beauty

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Professor Sophie Khan;	University lecturer, expert in ancient Greek artefacts. Very academic.	40's.	Female.
Zara;	Confident PHD student in ancient Greek archaeology Combined with marine archaeology.	20's.	Female.
Aniket;	PHD candidate with a cheerful sense of humour. Good friends with Zara.	20's.	Male.
Reporter;	Local news reporter with very little interest in her assignment.	30's.	Female.

SCENE ONE.

A LYRE AND A TYMPANUM PLAY A SOFT MELODY.

A RUMBLING ENGINE. A LORRY BEEPS REPETITIVELY AS IT REVERSES INTO A BAY. THE ENGINE STOPS. CAB DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES. BOOTS WALK AROUND TO THE REAR. THE CLACK OF THE REAR DOOR BEING UNLOCKED AND THE CREAK AS IT OPENS. A BOX DROPS ON THE LIFT, WHICH THEN WHIRS AS IT LOWERS TO THE GROUND.

THE MELODY FADES AWAY.

SOPHIE

Please, be careful with that crate.

REPORTER

Can I get a quote for the paper, Professor?

SOPHIE

Sorry, what?

REPORTER

A quote?

SOPHIE

Yes. Yes. Sorry. I'm just so very excited to get this stuff inside and begin examination. Our University is extremely excited to be able to lead the study of these artefacts from such and unprecedented discovery. The sunken wreck we excavated earlier this year was that of a 3000 year old merchant ship in the Aegean. A period of several hundred years before Alexander the Great, or the last stand of the Spartans at Thermopylae. This ship could have come from Troy. It's an amazing time to be in marine archaeology, especially at our University.

ANIKET

(LOW) I tell you what, Zara, the Professor's good. Very natural. Said excited a few too many times.

ZARA

(LOW) I don't think she needed to say the word excited at all, her voice is about three octaves higher than normal. Aniket, do you think she's been practicing in the mirror?

ANIKET

(LOW) That's why she's the excited face of the department.

They chuckle.

ZARA

(LOW) Nice touch with hinting to a potential connection with Troy, keep the investors and shit munchers excited. Keep those research grants rolling in.

They chuckle some more.

ANIKET

Oops, I think she may have heard us.

They chuckle again.

SOPHIE

Obviously the statue of a young woman is the prize find of the excavation and... sorry, if you'll excuse me, my colleagues are very excited to get these items inside.

REPORTER

That's quite understandable, Professor Kan. And you'll email me some photos for my article?

SOPHIE

Um- yes, of course. I'll send them this...

ZARA

It's Khan, Professor Sophie Khan. K-H-A-N.

REPORTER

Ah yes, sorry. Khan.

SOPHIE

Thank you, Zara. Sorry, Zara is one of my PHD students. She and Aniket, stood back there, were with me on the Odysseus when we discovered the wreck.

ZARA

In fact, why don't you hang around and take the photo's yourself? We can tell you all about the historical importance of the discovery and make sure you get all the facts and names correct in your article.

REPORTER

Oh, er. Thank you, but I can't. Have to be back in the office, I'm afraid. (PAUSE) Professor Sophie, if you just want to put all that in the email with the photos, that would be great.

SOPHIE

Of course.

REPORTER

Well, thank you for your time.

SOPHIE
You're welcome.

ZARA
(**SARCASTICALLY**) You're welcome.

Footsteps of the reporter walking away.

SOPHIE
Is that necessary?

ZARA
What? She got your name wrong.

ANIKET
She was hardly interested, Professor.

SOPHIE
But-

ZARA
I thought you were eager to get rid of her and get all of this stuff inside?

SOPHIE
Well, yes. Fine. Just be careful.

SCENE TWO.

The lyre and tympanum quietly resume their duet. It continues.

A crowbar jammed between the lid of a crate. Wood creaks.

SOPHIE
Please be-

ANIKET
Careful? Yes. I know.

ZARA
Do you know how to use that thing?

ANIKET
Stick it in, wiggle it about.

ZARA
I'll just let that hang there.

SOPHIE
Please, grow up. You're PHD candi... well, let's just open her up.

Zara sniggers.

Child.

ANIKET

Wood creaks and cracks. Nails squeal as they are pulled out of the wood.

A sudden pop as the lid comes free.

Ooh, careful.

SOPHIE

The wooden lid slides to the side and then falls to the floor. The clang echoes through the lab.

Wow. Just, wow.

SOPHIE

Look at that.

ANIKET

She's beautiful.

ZARA

Put on some gloves before you lift her out.

SOPHIE

The snaps of latex gloves being put on.

Aniket and Zara groan as they lift something heavy out of the crate.

Careful. Careful.

SOPHIE

The sound of marble resting on the examination table.

She sure weights a tonne.

ZARA

Still a looker for an old girl.

ANIKET

3000 years old is a little old, even for you.

SOPHIE

Zara and Sophie chuckle.

Nice one, Professor.

ZARA

ANIKET

An unfounded allegation.

ZARA

I've just never seen a marble statue shimmer like that. It looks more like quartz. It seems a shame they would have painted over stone that striking.

SOPHIE

Imagine what she would have looked like when she was complete. How the vibrant the colour would have been. I would love it if we were to find her arms and legs in the next survey.

ANIKET

I can't get over that face. That could be Helen.

ZARA

How cliché.

SOPHIE

I'd launch 10,000 research ships for her. Though it might be hard to convince the funding committee.

ANIKET

Probably best we found her with just the one then.

SOPHIE

I know it's late, but would you both want to stay on a while? Do a preliminary analysis maybe?

ANIKET

More than happy too.

ZARA

I wasn't planning going anywhere yet. We just go her out of the box. It's like Christmas.

SOPHIE

Good. I assumed you would, but had to ask. I can't take my eyes off of her. She's beautiful.

ZARA

It is just such a shame about the damage, though.

SOPHIE

She has certainly been through the wars.

ANIKET

(LAUGHING TO HIMSELF) The Trojan wars.

ZARA

Urgh.

ANIKET

So, the damage?

ZARA

The gouge across the right eye and forehead. Corrosion across the left side of the jaw.

ANIKET

It's the strange scratch like marks above the lip that gets me. I don't know how that could have been done when the ship sank, there wasn't a single rock on the sea floor where we found the wreck.

ZARA

I can guarantee it wasn't when we excavated her either. That is exactly how we found her. Scared the life out of me when the damaged side of her face suddenly appeared out of the sand. Spat out my regulator and everything.

SOPHIE

Hang on a moment, before we get too far, let me get the camera. Zara, can you switch on your dictaphone? We may as well start out initial analysis now. Aniket, could you turn off the music while we record.

ANIKET DOESN'T REPLY.

ZARA

Hello? Aniket? The Professor's speaking to you.

ANIKET

What? Oh, sorry. What Professor?

SOPHIE

I know. She's most arresting. But could you just turn off the music for now? So we can do an audio recording of our initial thoughts and analysis.

ANIKET

Yes, sure. Sorry.

A click. The melody stops.

ZARA

Really lovely choice. Definitely appropriate.

SOPHIE

Yes, their interpretations of how the instruments of Ancient Greece might have sounded seem so authentic.

The occasional snap of a camera shutter and soft footsteps of the three of them walking around the statue, examining it.

ZARA

The groove across the side of the head looks like it must have hacked off the ear.

SOPHIE

The left ear.

ZARA

Sorry, yes, the left ear.

ANIKET

Is... is that paint?

Pause.

ZARA

It looks so fresh.

ANIKET

Why would it be in the damaged area though?

SOPHIE

What appears to be red paint in the damage mark on the left side of the head, just above where the ear would have... it looks wet.

ANIKET

I haven't touched it.

ZARA

They put it straight into the crate onboard the boat after drying it out.

ANIKET

Fluff from a towel?

ZARA

It wasn't a trip to Zante, we didn't use beach towels to dry things off.

ANIKET

You know what I mean.

ZARA

It's not fluff.

A drip hits the table.

Silence.

ZARA

That's...

Silence.

ANIKET

It dripped off.

ZARA

Yeah.

SOPHIE

Um... Aniket, please get me a swab and sterilised slide.
(PAUSE) Zara, take the camera please while I take a sample. I want to examine whatever this is and log everything correctly. I don't want us to be accused of contaminating or damaging the statue when the Greek consulate come to visit the finds on Wednesday.

ZARA

Yes... sure, Professor.

Sound of passing the camera. Aniket walking.

A cupboard opens, then closes.

SOPHIE

Keep taking photos, please.

ANIKET

Professor.

SOPHIE

Thank you.

Very gentle scratching. Camera shutter.

SOPHIE

Aniket, just go and have a quick look at the sample under the microscope, please.

ANIKET

Yes, Professor.

ZARA

I hate to admit it, but I think Aniket was right earlier. The damage to this statue doesn't look like it was done in the shipwreck.

SOPHIE

It looks more like the ones in museums that were damaged or defaced when they were stolen. When the ship sunk, this statue should have been brand new. Surely it could only have been done during the wreck. What do you think, Aniket?
(LOUDER) Aniket.

ANIKET

Huh?

SOPHIE

Are you going to check the sample under the microscope?

ANIKET

Huh? (**PAUSE**) Oh, yeah. Yeah. I just... sorry... I couldn't look away.

ZARA

Someone's got a crush.

SOPHIE

I know how you feel. But, you know, get on with it. Please.

Footsteps as Aniket walks away. The lab door opens and closes.

SOPHIE

Where were we?

ZARA

The unusual state of damage.

SOPHIE

Yes, correct. I was saying we've never dealt with a 3000 year old statue from the bottom of the Aegean before.

ZARA

I know. But this damage, look how worn it is. How deep. Yet the features that are undamaged are still sharp. If the sea had done one, surely it would have worn down the eyes and the nose. The nose is always first to go.

SOPHIE

It's usually the arms first.

ZARA

Yes, okay. But on the face, it's the nose.

SOPHIE

So?

ZARA

If it was damaged before the sinking, why would someone take the trouble of shipping a damaged statue? Especially one this badly damaged. It was Ancient Greece after all, they were hardly r-

The lyre and tympanum music starts suddenly, but the music is more dramatic than before.

Zara let's out a squeal.

SOPHIE
Jesus. **(PAUSE)** How did that-

Click. The music stops.

ZARA
Who still uses a CD player? Come on, Professor.

An inaudible groan. A swish of flowing material. A grinding of rough marble against a hard surface.

SOPHIE
What was that?

ZARA
CD players, Professor. I think my grandmother owned-

SOPHIE
No, not the CD player. That noise. It sounded like... like she moved.

ZARA
What?

SOPHIE
The statue. Didn't you hear that?

ZARA
No. I didn't hear anything.

SOPHIE
She's moved.

ZARA
I didn't touch it. I'm over here. And you were stood talking to me.

SOPHIE
The folds in her dress have moved. Look at the fall lines.

ZARA
What? Sophie, you know it's marble, right? **(PAUSE)** It looks the same.

Tapping buttons. Camera beeps as Sophie scrolls through photos.

SOPHIE
Look at the pictures I took. Look. It's different. Look there. It falls left to right. Now it falls straight down.

ZARA
It's just the shadows or the angles.

SOPHIE

The lights haven't changed.

ZARA

Sophie, it is a statue. It's solid marble. It...

The door to the room opens. Aniket enters.

ANIKET

Um. I was just looking at the... through the microscope, and... I think you should come look.

ZARA

What?

ANIKET

Come look. Professor, you too. Professor? Are you okay?

SOPHIE

Yes. I'm coming. I just. Should one of us... I'll stay with her.

ZARA

Why? She isn't going anywhere.

Silence.

SOPHIE

Just. I'll stay with-

Footsteps as Zara walks out.

ANIKET

Sophie, you're going to want to come see this too.

SOPHIE

Fine, fine, I'm coming.

Heavier footsteps as Sophie walks out.

Silence.

The door slowly closes.

Silence.

The sound of rough marble grinding against a hard surface. A groan.

STATUE

(WHISPERED) Giatí den eímai kalós?

SCENE THREE.

The turning action of a microscope focusing.

That's a shame. ZARA

It's paint? SOPHIE

No. ANIKET

Fluff? SOPHIE

It's blood. ZARA

Blood? How? SOPHIE

It must have been contaminated, somehow. ZARA

By whom? SOPHIE

I'm not bleeding. ANIKET

Zara? SOPHIE

We've had gloves on this whole time. ZARA

I haven't touched her. SOPHIE

It must have been when they put it into the crate. People are forever getting scrapes on the ship and when diving and stuff. ZARA

But it's fresh. It dripped off the statue. ANIKET

Um. Yeah. I... ZARA

Check yourselves. SOPHIE

RUBBER GLOVES SNAP OFF.

ZARA

Look. I'm fine.

ANIKET

Yeah, Professor. Me too.

A MUFFLED WAIL COMES FROM THE OTHER ROOM. SILENCE.

ZARA

What was that?

ANIKET

Creepy.

SOPHIE

Is this a wind up, Aniket?

ANIKET

What? Why me?

SOPHIE

I was with Zara.

ANIKET

You were with me apart from when I was in here. How do I know it's not you two trying to get me going?

SOPHIE

I wouldn't do that. Not on a day like today.

ANIKET

Okay. Alright. But honestly, it isn't me, Professor.

SOPHIE

Can you go see what it is then?

ANIKET

Choose the guy to go check? Bit sexist isn't it?

ZARA

It's just you're the strongest.

ANIKET

Debatable.

ZARA

You're also her least favourite PHD student, so your most expendable.

SOPHIE

Look. Please. We will all go. Just...

ANIKET

It's okay. I'm sure it's outside or down the hall or something.

ZARA

Past 9?

ANIKET

We are still here aren't we? This is the marine sciences building. I'm sure there are plenty of other people without social lives here still. **(PAUSE)** Come on.

The door opens. One set of footsteps.

SOPHIE

I'm sure it's nothing, Zara.

ZARA

Fine.

Two more sets of footsteps. The door closes.

SCENE FOUR.

The slow grinding of marble on a hard surface.

STATUE

(BARELY AUDIBLE WHISPER) Giatí den eímai kalós?

Silence.

The lyre and the tympanum quietly starts a slow, melancholic melody.

The door slowly opens.

Breathing.

ANIKET

Oh.

SOPHIE

Aniket?

ANIKET

The... the statue. **(PAUSE)** That marble was made for moonlight. Look at it shimmer. It's incredible. Beautiful. Think of the last time a full moon struck that surface. Crazy really. A waste of millennia.

ZARA

It's very nice Aniket, but can you turn on the lights please.

SOPHIE

I didn't turn off the lights.

ZARA

And turn that bloody music off. I'm starting to get tired of it.

ANIKET

I could just stare at her all day.

ZARA

When did you open the blinds?

Click of a light switch. The ping, buzz of fluorescent lights coming on.

SOPHIE

They must have been open when we started.

ANIKET

Why wouldn't we have them open? Look at the way the moonlight dances off of her dress.

The lyre and tympanum duet begins to pick up speed. The music is erratic and uncomfortable.

ZARA

I don't remember seeing them open.

SOPHIE

No. Neither do I.

ANIKET

You wouldn't have noticed would you. We were all focused on her.

SOPHIE

I didn't turn off the lights, either. Did I Zara?

ZARA

I don't know. I was in front of you. **(A LITTLE FRANTIC)** Just turn that music off.

Click. Silence.

SOPHIE

Okay. I've unplugged it. I must not have had it PAT tested.

ANIKET

(LOW, TRANCE LIKE) Giatí den eímai kalós?

ZARA

What was that, Aniket?

ANIKET
(LOW, MONOTONE) Why am I not beautiful?

SOPHIE
What?

ANIKET
(AS IF WAKING) Huh? What about the lights? Where'd-

SOPHIE
Aniket, above your ear, you're bleeding.

ANIKET
I am? (PAUSE) Bugger, yeah.

ZARA
Solves the blood.

SOPHIE
I didn't see it befo... Aniket, that looks deep.

ZARA
Yeah, I think you might need some stitches. Are you okay?
Didn't you feel it?

ANIKET
Honestly, I'm fine. I didn't... I... yeah can I get a tissue
please?

A semi regular dripping of blood on the
floor.

SOPHIE
Aniket, you don't remember hitting your head?

ZARA
Here.

ANIKET
Thanks. No. I haven't hit it.

ZARA
That gash above your ear says otherwise.

SOPHIE
That's a serious wound.

Aniket winces.

ZARA
That's really bleeding.

ANIKET

Ouch. I... **(PAUSE)** Turn the lights off. That moonlight. She glows. I can't look away.

SOPHIE

I think you need a doctor. You might be concussed.

ZARA

I'll call an ambulance I think. You're starting to lose quite a bit of blood.

SOPHIE

You don't remember hitting it at all?

ANIKET

(ANGRY) I didn't hit it.

ZARA

Okay, Aniket. Calm down.

ANIKET

I don't want to go to hospital. She doesn't want me to.

Silence.

SOPHIE

Okay, Aniket. You're starting to worry me now. You've got a serious head wound and I think you need to get some medical attention.

ANIKET

(SHOUTING) I'm not leaving her.

The fluorescent bulbs ping off. Quickly followed by a deafening blare of the lyre and tympanum combo, dramatic and oppressive.

ZARA

(SHOUTING OVER THE MUSIC) Sophie. Where's Aniket?

The tympanum beat gets faster and faster and faster.

ZARA

(SHOUTING OVER THE MUSIC) Sophie? Aniket?

Smash of the CD player being thrown against the floor. The music slurs and growls drunkenly. Smash. Smash. Smash.

Silence, except for a single person breathing heavily.

Footsteps. Click. Ping, buzz of the fluorescent lights.

ZARA

(TREMBLING) Sophie, where's Aniket? What's... what is going on?

Silence.

Sophie sighs.

SOPHIE

(ODDLY ACCEPTING) I don't know.

ZARA

But where's he gone? He's concussed, Sophie. He's lost a lot of blood.

SOPHIE

(BARELY AUDIBLE) You are beautiful.

ZARA

Sophie, you're our professor. Why aren't you worried? You have a duty of care. He could be passed out somewhere.

SOPHIE

You can understand why he didn't want to leave her. She's enchanting.

ZARA

Sophie, she's a fucking old statue. Pull yourself- **(PAUSE)**how?

SOPHIE

Her ear?

ZARA

Yes, her ear. Of course, her ear. It's grown back, Sophie. How has it grown back?

SOPHIE

I... I don't... she's even more arresting than before.

ZARA

Sophie, I'm going to find Aniket, and then I'm taking him to the hospital. I recommend you come with me.

SOPHIE

No.

ZARA

No?

SOPHIE

I don't want to leave her alone.

Zara gasps.

ZARA
Sophie, you've got a rash along the side of your face.

SOPHIE
(**UNCARING**) Oh, do I?

ZARA
I think you should come to the hospital with me. Something is wrong. You don't feel the rash?

SOPHIE
I'm just in awe of her.

ZARA
I'm going to find Aniket. I'll stop back before I leave. Okay? Sophie? (**PAUSE**) Forget it.

Zara's footsteps to the door.

The door opens. Pause. Zara's footsteps fade away. The door creaks shut.

Silence.

ZARA
(**MUFFLED/DISTANT**) Aniket? (**FADING**) Aniket? Hello?

Silence.

SOPHIE
Giatí den eímai kalós?

Marble grinds against a hard surface.

The lyre and tympanum begin to quietly play their duet.

SCENE FIVE.

Zara's footsteps echo down the empty corridor. Occasionally there is the sound of the depression of door handles and the creek of doors being opened and closed.

ZARA
Aniket? Hey, Aniket. Hello, anyone? (**PAUSE**) Come on, someone? Aniket, please. Aniket?

A high pitched shriek from down the hall.

ZARA
(PANICKED) Sophie? Aniket?

Running footsteps. Zara panting.

ZARA
 Sophie. Sophie, I'm coming. What's going on?

Running stops. The low, muffled music of the lyre and the tympanum.

ZARA
 Sophie, come on.

The gentle depression of the door handle. The music slowly becomes a little louder and clearer.

ZARA
 Sophie? Sophie, where's the statue?

The sound of marble slowly grinding on a hard surface.

SOPHIE
(GRITTY) Giatí den eímai kalós?

ZARA
 What? **(CRYING)** Sophie. Sophie.

SOPHIE
(SCREECHING) Giatí den eímai kalós?

Fast footsteps. Intense grinding of stone.

The lyre and tympanum hit a fast paced crescendo.

Zara screams. Screams. Screams.

Silence.

STATUE
(LOW) Giatí den eímai kalós?